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The ANTIQUITY *of the* WOOLLEN MANUFACTURE *in* IRELAND, *proved from a Paſſage of an antient Florentine Poet. By the Earl of* CHARLEMONT, *P. R. I. A.*

Read Feb. 20, 1786.

THE following lines are taken from an old Italian poem, entitled Dittamondi *, and written by Fazio Delli Uberti, a nobleman of Florence, who, though certainly not, as ſome ſuppoſe, contemporary with Dante, flouriſhed not long after the death of that poet; but, as the value of the information contained in theſe lines principally depends upon the antiquity of the work, it may not be ſuperfluous, as far as I am able, to aſcertain its date.

IN the nineteenth chapter of the fourth book, the author concludes a genealogical account of the kings of France with theſe lines:

> Philippo di Valiſo Signor poi
> Et Giovan el Figliol, del qual conchiudo
> Che con gran' guerra tiene el Regno ancoi †.

FROM hence it appears certain, that, as John the ſon of Philip of Valois is mentioned as the monarch then reigning, the poem muſt have been compoſed before the year 1364, in

* We are told by Quadrio, della Storia e della Ragione d'ogni Poeſia, vol. iv. p. 47, that the true title of this poem was Dicta Mundi, which was afterwards, by corruption, written Dittamondi, and Dittamondo.

† *Philip of Valois afterward was Lord,*
And John his ſon, with whom I now conclude,
Who with a mighty war ſtill holds the realm.

which year that Prince died; and ſince we are farther informed that he ſtill holds the Kingdom *with a mighty war*, we may thence fairly conclude that the publication was previous to the treaty of Bretigny in the year 1360*.

THIS whimſical poem, which in point of language is of ſuch authority as to be cited by the authors of the Dictionary della Cruſca, and is written in Terza Rima, a ſpecies of verſification which Dante had then made faſhionable, contains an hiſtorical and geographical account of all the nations of the world. The author, having travelled through England and Scotland, paſſes into Ireland, a deſcription of which country, and of its inhabitants, he begins as follows:

Cap. xxvi. lib. iv.
Similimente paſſamo en Irlanda,
La qual fra noi e degna de Fama
Per le nobile SAIE che ci manda †.

THESE lines appear to me to contain a full proof of a moſt extraordinary fact—That Ireland ſhould have been already famous for her woollen manufactures ſo early as in the middle of the fourteenth century, and ſhould at that period have imported them into Italy, where the vent of theſe commodities was even then ſo fully eſtabliſhed, and the ſuperiority of their fabric ſo univerſally acknowledged, as to render the country from

* From a paſſage in the beginning of the 13th chap. of the 2d book, the date of the poem ſeems to be aſcertained to the year 1357. The paſſage, however, with a ſlight and warrantable alteration, may receive an eaſier conſtruction, ſo as to bring the date down to 1363, in which caſe the war alluded to by the poet may poſſibly mean thoſe civil commotions in which John was involved even after the concluſion of the peace with England.

† *In like manner we paſs into Ireland, which among us is worthy of renown for the excellent ſerges that ſhe ſends us.*

whence

whence they came *degna de Fama*, and to entitle them to the epithet *nobile*, is a fact which, without a proof ſo incontrovertible as the teſtimony of our author, would never have been credited; eſpecially when we reflect that England was not then in poſſeſſion of any ſuch commerce, ſince we know, to a certainty, that Edward III. during whoſe reign, many years before his death, the poem was undoubtedly written, was the firſt of our kings who effectually encouraged the Engliſh to apply themſelves to the woollen manufacture. For, though there is no doubt that wool was wrought in England ſo early as in the time of Richard I. and even earlier, yet is it more than probable that ſuch manufacture was principally, if not wholly, for home conſumption, as raw wool was at that time, and long after, the principal article of Engliſh export, and all our hiſtorians agree in fixing the date of the woollen manufacture in England, as an object of importance, to the year 1331, fifth of Edward III. in which year that wiſe monarch brought over from Flanders John Kemp, and ſeveral other Flemiſh woollen weavers. Yet is it clear, from the above lines, that at this very period Ireland was already in poſſeſſion of this branch of commerce, and famous for her woollens, which ſhe exported to diſtant regions, and ſent even into Italy, at that time the moſt poliſhed of all European countries, and the moſt eminent for trade and manufactures *.

* The city of Florence, to which probably our *Florentine* author more particularly aſcribes the conſumption of Iriſh ſerges, was not only eminent for her manufactures, but in an high degree remarkable for her luxury in dreſs, as may be ſeen by conſulting the Hiſtory of Giovanni Villani, lib. x. cap. 152, where that good old chronicler, in his account of a ſumptuary law enacted in the year 1330, circumſtantially details the enormous profuſion of his countrymen, and more eſpecially of his countrywomen, in that article. Villani farther informs us, that this ſumptuary ordinance was not only applauded,

Saia * is, in the Dictionary della Cruſca, explained to be *Spezie di Panno lano ſottile e leggieri*—A deſcription which anſwers to our ſerge. And the epithet *nobile* ſtrongly expreſſes the excellence of the commodity, and the high repute in which it was held. It is remarkable that Iriſh wool is ſtill found to be better adapted to the conſtruction of ſerges, and the other articles of what is called *new drapery*, than to broad cloth.

The following quotation from a very antient Florentine account book, in the Dictionary della Cruſca, Article Saia, is a further proof of the above-mentioned extraordinary fact—" Per un Pezza " di Saia d'Irlanda per veſtir della Moglie d'Andrea †." From hence alſo it appears, that Iriſh ſerge was among the Italians an article of female dreſs, a circumſtance which might induce us to ſuppoſe that the fabric was then of a finer ‡ and more delicate texture than what is now made under that denomination.

applauded, but adopted by many other ſtates of Italy; and that the ladies, whom this law had extremely offended, when forbidden the exorbitant uſe of Italian finery, revenged themſelves by the importation of foreign wares.

* *Saia*, which, as the commodity was foreign, is probably a word not originally Italian, may perhaps have been altered and italianized from ſerge, which, according to Skinner, is derived from the German *ſerge*, a mat. The French and the Spaniards have adopted the ſame appellation—*ſerge*, French—*xerga*, Spaniſh. But as this kind of ſtuff is alſo called in Engliſh *ſay*—Shakeſpeare, Henry VI. ſecond part—" Ah, " thou *ſay*, thou ſerge, thou buckram Lord!" which Skinner derives from *ſagum*, " tunica militaris, quoniam iſte pannus ſagis conficiendis valde commodus eſt," it is ſtill more probable that the Italian word *ſaia* was formed from this.

† *For a piece of ſerge of Ireland for clothing the wife of Andrew.*

‡ From a line in the Fairy Queen, book iii. cant. 12, ſtanza 8, we might perhaps be induced to ſuppoſe that in England alſo ſerge was formerly of a finer texture, or at leaſt more faſhionable, than it now is—

" His garment neither was of ſilk nor *ſay*."

Here the Poet ſeems to put ſerge upon a level with ſilk, at that time a very coſtly article of dreſs.

The

THE remarkable information conveyed in the lines above cited having induced me to examine into the ſtate of the fact, I find that in times, very early indeed, Ireland was noted for her woollens, which were freely imported into England.

IN the reign of Henry III. who reigned from 1216 to 1271, a duel was awarded and fought between Walter Blowberme, an approver, and Hamon le Stare; the former having accuſed the latter of having been partner with him in ſtealing clothes and other goods at Wincheſter, whereof Hamon had for his ſhare two coats, to wit, one of *Iriſh cloth*, and the other a party coat cloth of Abendon and Burrel of London.—*Vid. Madox' Hiſtory of the Exchequer*, vol. i. page 550.

THAT in the time of Edward III. Iriſh frizes were freely imported into England, and even encouraged there, we learn from the eighth and laſt ſtatute of his reign, whereby it is enacted that no ſubſidy nor aulnage duty ſhall be paid on cloths called frize ware, which be made in Ireland, or in England of Iriſh wool; becauſe thoſe cloths did not contain the length nor breadth ordained by the ſtatute.—*Anderſon's Commerce*, vol. i. page 204.

IN a licenſe granted to the Pope's agent, A. D. 1482, An. 5. Ric. II. for exporting into Italy certain commodities cuſtom-free, we find the following articles of Iriſh woollen, viz. five mantles of *Iriſh cloth*, one lined with green—one ruſſet garment lined with *Iriſh cloth*.—*Rim. Fœdera*, vol. vii. page 136.

BY an act of parliament, fourth of Edward IV. it is enacted that no cloth of any other region but Wales and Ireland ſhall be imported into England, excepting cloth taken at ſea.—*Anderſon*, vol. i. page 280.

FROM

FROM all theſe ſeveral facts, and particularly from the paſſage of our author, we may fairly conclude that Ireland was poſſeſſed of an extenſive trade in woollens at a very early period, and long before that commodity was an article of Engliſh export. Manufactures are ſlow in being brought to that degree of perfection which may render them an object coveted by diſtant countries, eſpecially where the people of thoſe countries have arrived at a high degree of poliſh; and if in the middle of the fourteenth century the ſerges of Ireland were eagerly ſought after*, and worn with a preference by the poliſhed Italians, there can be no doubt that the fabric had been eſtabliſhed for a very long time before that period. Nay, we may perhaps be allowed to hazard a conjecture, which, however whimſical it may appear, is by no means impoſſible, that the wiſe Edward might have laboured to eſtabliſh the woollen manufacture among his Engliſh ſubjects, in imitation of the

* If the ſerges of Ireland were eagerly ſought after by the Italians, and particularly by the Florentines, it muſt have been for the peculiar excellence of their quality, and not by any means from the want of home-made woollens, ſince we may clearly infer from a paſſage in Machiavel's Florentine Hiſtory, that about the year 1380 the woollen manufacture was, and had long been, eſtabliſhed at Florence. The hiſtorian, ſpeaking of the trades or guilds of that city, has theſe words—" E di " tutte l'arti che haveva, e ha, più di queſti ſottopoſti, era, ed è, *quella della Lana*, " laquale per eſſere potentiſſima, e la prima per autorità de tutte, con l'induſtria ſua " la maggior parte della plebe e popolo minuto paſceva e paſce."—" *And of all the* " *guilds that had, and have, the moſt of theſe* (ſubordinate trades) *under their juriſdiction,* " *was, and is, that of the* WOOLLEN WEAVERS, *which, as being the moſt powerful,* " *and the firſt of all in authority, by its induſtry fed, and ſtill feeds, the greater part of the* " *populace, and loweſt claſs of the people.*" Now, if in the year 1380 the corporation of woollen weavers was the greateſt and moſt powerful in Florence, containing in it, and preſiding over many ſubordinate and ancillary trades, ſuch as carders, dyers, &c. we may fairly conclude that the manufacture muſt have been eſtabliſhed in that city long before 1360, about which time the Dittamondi was written.

Iriſh,

Iriſh, and in competition with the trade extenſively carried on by a people, who, however erroneouſly, we are taught to believe were at that period little removed from a ſtate of abſolute barbarity. For the native Iriſh, upon whom the aſperſion principally falls, muſt have had a ſhare in this traffic, the Engliſh ſettlers being too few, and too much occupied by perpetual broils, to be alone equal to an extenſive manufacture. Our author indeed himſelf in a great meaſure contradicts this calumny, and the character which he gives of the Iriſh in his time tends greatly to diminiſh that idea of barbarity which is uſually objected to them:

> Queſta Gente, benche moſtra ſelvagia,
> E per gli Monti la Contrada accierba,
> Nondimeno l'e dolcie ad cui l'aſaggia *.

Fazio, or Bonifazio, delli Uberti, grandſon to the celebrated Farinata †, is ſuppoſed to have viſited in perſon moſt of the countries he deſcribes. His family ‡, one of the moſt illuſtrious of Florence, and head of the Ghibellines, having been driven into baniſhment by the oppoſite faction, he is ſaid to have taken advantage of this opportunity to indulge his taſte for travelling, and the Dittamondi is in effect no other than an

> * *This race of men, tho' ſavage they may ſeem,*
> *The country too with many a mountain rough,*
> *Yet are they ſweet to him who tries and taſtes them.*

† For ſome account of this Tuſcan hero, vid. Iſtorie di Giovanni Villani, lib. vi. cap. 82—Machiavelli, Iſtorie Florentine, lib. ii. page 45.—Alſo, Dante, Inferno. canto x.

‡ Vid. Creſcimboni, Hiſtoria della volgar Poeſia, vol. iv. part ii. page 160.—Quadrio, della Storia e della Ragione d'ogni Poeſia, vol. iv. page 47. Both theſe authors expreſsly mention the travels of Fazio.

account

account of his extenſive travels, together with a ſketch of the hiſtory of the countries through which he paſſed. Neither is there any reaſon to doubt that the author was actually in Ireland; his perſonal acquaintance with that iſland appears not only from the accurate manner of his deſcription, but more eſpecially from his expreſsly telling us that he had himſelf ſeen there certain lakes, the peculiar qualities of which he minutely details—Qui *vid' io* di più natura Laghi *. This laſt circumſtance I mention, as it ſerves to ſhew that Ireland was then of ſufficient note to induce a learned and illuſtrious Italian, notwithſtanding the dangers of the navigation, which he feelingly deſcribes †, to viſit its remote ſhores.

THE book from which theſe quotations are taken is extremely ſcarce, being the firſt printed edition of the Dittamondi, printed at Vicenza in the year 1474.

* *Here* I ſaw *lakes of various natures.*

† Diverſi Venti con mugli et con fiſcio
Soſiavan per quel Mare andando a piagia,
El qual de Scogli e de gran Saſſi e miſchio.

Still varying winds with hiſs and hideous roar
Blow thro' that ſea, coaſting the dangerous ſhoal,
Of iſles and monſtrous rocks a maſs confuſed.